

COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA

EMERGING LEADERS SEMINAR

‘A NEW GENERATION OF POLITICIAN’

ACKNOWLEDGE: JOHN POULSEN, PRESIDENT WA CEDA
LISA SCAFFIDI, DIRECTOR WA CEDA,

I MUST CONFESS TO SOME APPREHENSION ABOUT THIS MORNING, NOT ONLY DUE TO THE AUDIENCE, BUT THE TOPIC OF LEADERSHIP IS ONE THAT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO ANALYSE IN AN OBJECTIVE WAY WHEN TALKING ABOUT ONESELF!

HOWEVER, KEEPING THE TOPIC OF THE SERIES ‘EMERGING LEADERS’ IN MIND, I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD OUTLINE BROADLY THE LIFE OF A STATE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE JOB, IN PARTICULAR, THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A VERY YOUNG MP OR, I GUESS, FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS MORNING, AN ‘EMERGING MP’. THEN I WILL REFLECT ON THE REQUIREMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE JOB.

A NEW GENERATION OF POLITICIAN?!

I NOTE THE REFERENCE TO ME AS A ‘NEW GENERATION’ OF POLITICIAN. THIS ALIGNS NICELY WITH THE TERM ‘EMERGING’ AND I WILL DEMONSTRATE SHORTLY THAT NO MATTER HOW NEW THE GENERATION IS, SOME THINGS DO INDEED STAY THE SAME.

THE ‘EMERGING LEADERS’ BREAKFASTS ARE INVITATION ONLY. BY THE FACT OF BEING HERE THIS MORNING, WE ARE ALL IN POSITIONS THAT ARE PERHAPS, SOMEWHAT UNIQUE DUE TO:

- POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY THAT ARE, PERHAPS, UNIQUE TO OUR AGE GROUP; OR
- ARE VIEWED AS HAVING THE POTENTIAL TO TAKE ON FUTURE SIGNIFICANT LEADERSHIP ROLES.

AS THE SIGN SAYS, I AM THE STATE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE ELECTORATE OF VICTORIA PARK. I WAS ELECTED YOUNG, JUST PRIOR TO MY 32ND BIRTHDAY. MY PREDECESSOR, DR GALLOP, WAS 35 WHEN HE WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT SO THERE IS PERHAPS SOME PRECEDENT IN MY ELECTORATE FOR ‘EMERGING’ POLITICIANS TO BEGIN THEIR CAREER’S EARLY.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH I ENTERED PARLIAMENT WERE UNIQUE AND MAGNIFIED, BY WAY OF A BY-ELECTION - BOTH PREVIOUS MEMBERS HAD BEEN IN THE JOB A LONG TIME AND BOTH HAD BECOME LEADERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY, GALLOP WAS PREMIER WHEN HE RETIRED, AND, AS MENTIONED, I WAS, COMPARATIVELY, YOUNG.

BY-ELECTION HELD ON 11 MARCH 2006, 11 CANDIDATES WHICH WAS NEARLY A RECORD. IT WAS DURING THE BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT I FIRST BUMPED UP AGAINST THE 'EMERGING' SIDE OF LEADERSHIP, THAT IS, YOUTH. YOUTH, OF COURSE, ISN'T ATTACKED SO OVERTLY, ITS DONE WITH THE CUNNING OF POLITICS.....I WASN'T TOO YOUNG, I HAD A 'LACK OF EXPERIENCE'.

IT IS CLEAR FROM THOSE IN ATTENDANCE THIS MORNING THAT, IN TODAY'S WORLD, THIS CLAIM NO LONGER HAS ANY MERIT. CAPABILITY IS THE KEY OVER EXPERIENCE (eg TIM MARNEY). IN A FULL WORKFORCE AND A GLOBALISED WORLD, MORE IS FALLING TO OUR EMERGING LEADERS IN ALL SECTORS, GOVERNMENT OR INDUSTRY.

THERE ARE THREE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY UNDER THE AGE OF 40 (ONE IS A PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY AND THE OTHER THE LEADER OF THE NATIONAL PARTY) SO THERE IS AN INHERENT CONSERVATISM IN THE SYSTEM AND A BIAS AGAINST YOUTH. NOW THAT I AM IN THE ROLE OF AN MP, I TEND TO

AGREE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER...!! VOTERS DO NOT CARE ABOUT AGE, PROVIDED THE JOB CAN BE DONE. FURTHER, AS THE ROLE OF AN MP HAS CHANGED, AND CONTINUES TO CHANGE, SO SIGNIFICANTLY, OVER THE LAST 10-20 YEARS, AND AS THE DEMANDS ON MP'S RISE, IT IS MY VERY FIRM VIEW THAT PARLIAMENT NEEDS TO REGULARLY RENEW ITSELF.

VICTORIA PARK HAD A VERY HIGH PROFILE MP FOR 20 YEARS....10 OF THOSE YEARS GALLOP WAS THE LEADER OF THE STATE ALP. FOR A LONG TIME GEOFF WAS NOT AN EMERGING LEADER, HE WAS A LEADER. IT IS INTERESTING, AT THE AGE OF 31, TO TAKE OVER AN ELECTORATE THAT HAS HAD SUCH A CHARACTER FOR SO LONG.

ROLE OF AN MP IN MODERN TIMES?

ODD, NO JOB DESCRIPTION. WHEN I STARTED AT MINTERS I HAD A WEEK OF INDUCTION. DURING MY BY-ELECTION, THERE WERE OVER 200 PEOPLE WORKING ON MY CAMPAIGN. ONCE ELECTED ITS “SEE YOU AT THE NEXT ELECTION!” THE EERIE SILENCE FOLLOWING AN ELECTION IS, I ASSURE YOU, SOMEWHAT DISCONCERTING!

PHILIP NORTON, BRITISH POLITICAL SCIENTIST, WROTE:

“THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MP’S AND THEIR CONSTITUENCIES IS SUBJECT TO NO FORMAL RULES. THERE IS NO OFFICIAL JOB DESCRIPTION”.

ACCORDINGLY, MP’S ARE ABLE TO MAKE THEIR JOB WHAT THEY WANT OF IT.

QUITE OFTEN MEMBERS CAN BE ELECTED AND DRIFT THROUGH THEIR PARLIAMENARY CAREER WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TO THE ACCOUNTABILITY TESTS APPLIED TO MOST IN TODAY’S WORKFORCE, WHICH IS OFTEN A SOURCE OF AGGRAVATION TO MANY IN THE COMMUNITY WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE POWERS AND PRIVILEGES ASSOCIATED WITH BEING AN MP (per G.Gallop).

THE QUESTION BECOMES DOES, AND SHOULD, ELECTION AND RE-ELECTION EXHAUST THE ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS? IT SEEMS TO ME THAT MOST PEOPLE REGARD THEIR MP'S LIKE A COMPANY DIRECTOR, THEY HAVE BEEN VOTED TO THEIR POSITION TO FULFILL THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES. THE ACT OF THE VOTE IS, IN EFFECT, DELEGATING THIS RESPONSIBILITY TO THE DIRECTOR OR PARLIAMENTARIAN. EVERY ELECTION, THIS VOTE IS THEN REASSESSED.

I WOULD ESTIMATE THAT APPROXIMATELY 70% OF THE POPULATION DO NOT DIRECTLY ENGAGE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM THROUGH THEIR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, THAT IS, THEY HAVE CAST THEIR VOTE AND EXPECT THEIR MEMBER TO FULLFILL THEIR ROLE IN AN APPROPRIATE WAY. HOW DO I ENSURE THAT I AM SUFFICIENTLY INFORMED OF PUBLIC VIEWS, OPINION AND CONCERN SO THAT I CAN OFFER A SENSIBLE REPRESENTATION OF MY ELECTORATE? ACCORDINGLY, I AM FOREVER COMING UP WITH NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE MY ELECTORATE. HOWEVER, WHAT THIS SUGGESTS IS THAT PEOPLE EXPECT A CERTAIN DEGREE OF LEADERSHIP IN THESE ROLES, AS DO SHAREHOLDERS OR A BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN DELEGATING MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY TO ITS EXECUTIVES.

POPULISM IS EASY AND THE MOST ATTRACTIVE APPROACH FOR ANY MP. HOWEVER, THE ROLE OF A STATE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT IS BROADER THAN ONE'S OWN ELECTORATE, WE ARE THERE TO CONSIDER ISSUES OF STATE-WIDE

SIGNIFICANCE. THIS IS WHERE THE PRESSURES OF LEADERSHIP CAN OFTEN BRING PEOPLE UNSTUCK. IN THIS REGARD, IT IS IMPORTANT TO TRUST ONE'S OWN OPINION. (GEOFF GALLOP EXAMPLE OF BORONIA PRISON) – WHILST IT WAS NOT LOCALLY POPULAR, GEOFF REPRESENTED HIS SUPPORT OF THE PRISON SANELY AND SENSIBLY AND WAS AWARDED WITH A SWING TO HIM IN THE SUBSEQUENT ELECTION.

MANY RESPONSIBILITIES – THE ELECTORATE, THE PARLIAMENT, THE PARTY, THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY, THE COMMUNITY AND, IF A MINISTER OR SHADOW, THE PORTFOLIO. IT IS VITAL FOR ANY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT TO JUGGLE THESE RESPONSIBILITIES EFFECTIVELY.

ELECTORATE WORK IS ENORMOUSLY VARIED. PHILIP NORTON SAID *“THE ROLE OF AN MP IS TO BE A SAFETY VALVE FOR THE PUBLIC, ALLOWING CITIZENS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES ABOUT THE ISSUES OF THE DAY; TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON A RANGE OF MATTERS; TO BE A LOCAL DIGNATORY; TO BE AN ADVOCATE; TO BE A BENEFACTOR AND POWERFUL FRIEND; AND A PROMOTER OF LOCAL INTERESTS AND CONCERNS. THE WORKLOAD IS GREAT AND BECOMING GREATER”*.

A LINK BETWEEN THE DISENGAGED AND THE REST OF SOCIETY (FUNDAMENTAL ROLE!) – THIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT, AND SATISFYING, ROLE.

MP'S DO INDEED HAVE A DEEPER RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST THAN MOST OTHER OCCUPATIONS. THIS MAY BE DUE TO THE UNIQUE POWERS AND PRIVILEGES MP'S HAVE. THE POWERS MP'S POSSESS ARE THREE-FOLD:

- THE RESOURCES OF OFFICE;
- THE POWERS OF PARLIAMENT;
- THE PRIVILEGES OF PARLIAMENT.

IT IS THE BREACHES TO VARIOUS DEGREES OF THESE POWERS THAT ARE THE REASONS WHY MP'S HAVE LOST STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, IT IS THE USE OF THESE POWERS THAT CAN MAKE THE OPERATIONS OF AN MP ENORMOUSLY EFFECTIVE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COMMUNITY (per G.Gallop).

AMAZINGLY COMPLEX JOB – TWO STAFF WHO WORK 6 DAYS A WEEK. I WORK 7 DAYS A WEEK. AN EXPERT ON ALL THINGS GOVERNANCE RELATED (AND, IN MY CASE, LEGAL ISSUES). AN ELECTORATE OFFICE IS A STATE ‘COMPLAINT OFFICE’. [*SLIDE 1*]

IT IS OFTEN IMPORTANT TO SWALLOW ANY FORM OF PRIDE YOU MAY HAVE HAD....[SLIDE SHOW IN HERE]

“POLITICIANS” – SIMILAR TO LAWYERS EXCEPT WORSE. INDIVIDUAL –V- COLLECTIVE.

FRUSTRATIONS OF PARTY POLITICS?

PARLIAMENTARY –V- ELECTORATE WORK. WHEN I WAS ELECTED, PETER DOWDING WAS AT PARLIAMENT FOR MY FIRST SPEECH AND HE MADE THE COMMENT “BE CAREFUL NOT TO BECOME A SOCIAL WORKER TO YOUR ELECTORATE”.

POLICY AND STATE ISSUES ARE, WITHOUT DOUBT, THE TRUE MEAT OF THE JOB. MP’S WHO WANT TO ENTER PARLIAMENT TO HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THE DIRECTION OF THE ‘SHIP OF STATE’ WANT TO SPEND TIME ON THESE ISSUES. HOWEVER, THE NEVER ENDING TIDE OF ELECTORATE WORK IS A HARD HARD GRIND AND OFTEN HORRIBLY DEPRESSING. BUT IT IS THIS WORK THAT ENABLES A PERSON TO BECOME A BETTER MP AND, IN THE END, A BETTER MINISTER. IT ENSURES THAT MINISTER’S NEVER FORGET THAT POLICY WORK IS NOT SIMPLY THEORY AND WILL AND DOES EFFECT REAL PEOPLE IN REAL WAYS.

AND THIS IS WHERE ANOTHER ASPECT TO LEADERSHIP QUICKLY EMERGES. KNOWING ONE’S OWN LIMITATIONS. BECAUSE IF YOU DON’T KNOW THEM, THE NATURE OF POLITICS (AND BUSINESS) IS THAT THERE ARE MANY MANY PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO WILL POINT THEM OUT TO YOU SHOULD YOU FORGET, THE MEDIA, THE OPPOSITION, YOUR PARLIAMENTARY COLLEAGUES, PEOPLE ON THE STREET....PARENTS!.

HOWEVER, THIS IS WHERE I AGAIN RETURN TO THE COURAGE OF CONVICTIONS AND THE FORMULATION OF

YOUR OWN POSITION. DO NOT RELY ON OTHERS TO GIVE YOU YOUR OPINION. TAKING ADVICE IS NOT ONLY SENSIBLE, IT IS A MUST. HOWEVER, AS MUCH AS WE TRY, LEADERSHIP CANNOT BE OUTSOURCED. IT IS UP TO YOU TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION AND IMPLEMENT THAT DECISION. WHETHER IT IS A BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SHAREHOLDERS, OR CONSTITUENTS, YOU WILL NEED TO JUSTIFY YOUR DECISIONS YOUR POSITION TAKEN YOUR LEADERSHIP ASSERTED. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP. RESPONSIBILITY. AND THIS IS WHY IT IS SO HARD, BECAUSE EXERCISING LEADERSHIP MEANS MAKING DECISIONS AND, THEREFORE, ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OUTCOMES OF THOSE DECISIONS.

EMERGING INTO THE FIRING LINE OF LEADERSHIP IS DIFFICULT, BUT A MEASURE OF CONFIDENCE IN ONE'S OWN DECISION MAKING ABILITY ASSISTS. AS WELL AS AN ELEMENT OF STUBBORNESS! AS A LEADER IN MY ELECTORATE, I TAKE ON ROLES I COULD NEVER POSSIBLY IMAGINE, ARGUE FOR CAUSES I NEVER KNEW EXISTED. IT IS NOT EASY AS EVERY DECISION MADE UPSETS SOMEBODY.

I HAVE BEEN IN PARLIAMENT FOR 13 MONTHS, AND IT HAS NOT BEEN A PRETTY 13 MONTHS FOR THE STATE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THROUGH THE MESS OF SCANDAL GOVERNMENT STILL NEEDS TO TAKE PLACE, GOVERNMENT, LIKE THE PRIVATE SECTOR, STILL NEEDS TO INNOVATE AND FULFILL ITS OBLIGATIONS. LEADERSHIP STILL CREATES ITS OWN SPACE TO OPERATE.

“LEADERSHIP IS AN ELUSIVE CONCEPT, HARD TO DESCRIBE AND IMPOSSIBLE TO PRESCRIBE. IT IS MORE EVIDENT IN ITS ABSENCE, SO THAT WHEN LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED, ITS ABSENCE IS SORELY FELT”. (per Pat Dodson).